affairs to put pressure on the Polish authorities), but also from French "anti-racist" groups (MRAP and SOS-Racisme), liberal and leftist organs like *Le Monde* and the *Daily Mirror*, and even from the international banks, rumoured to be unwilling to re-schedule Poland's crushing foreign debts if the Carmel is not moved.

Note too how the stakes have been raised. What began as the relatively small-scale question of one Polish convent has step by step escalated; the charge of anti-semitism has progressively been raised against the Poles and their cardinals, and against Catholicism as a whole, until the Holy See itself is caricatured as guilty of racial and religious bias.

And this despite the evident fact that Rome has been yielding ground to Judaism ever since the Council (the disappearance of "perfidious Jews" from the Good Friday prayers, the 1985 directive of Cardinal Willebrand's pontifical commission calling on us to work with the Jews "to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah", and John Paul II's own placatory words to the Roman synagogue in April 1986 [12] are but three examples of this.)

The Church's reluctance to submit to this current demand, its unwillingness to surrender its universal vocation to save all mankind, Jew and Gentile, no doubt infuriates a certain Jewish lobby (and their hidden masters). That vocation is being defended today (under God) by a handful of devoted Polish contemplative nuns, their supporters and bishops, just as Christian Europe was saved from the Turks under the walls of Vienna in 1683 by the tiny Polish army of John Sobieski. We must not allow their cause, and ours, to go by default.

G.L.

---

(12) Readers will find the subject more fully treated in Jean Madiran's "The Jewish Question in the Church", a supplement to APPROACHES No.93.)

THIS IS A SUPPLEMENT TO APROPOS NO.7

THE TRUTH ABOUT

THE CARMELITE CONVENT AT AUSCHWITZ

by Yves Daoudal

(Translated by Geoffrey Lawman)

Published by: APROPOS, (Editor A.S. Fraser), Burnbrae, Staffin Road, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9HP. Tel. 0478 2239

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CARMELITE CONVENT AT AUSCHWITZ

by YVES DAOUDAL

(Apart from the two brief statements on the Auschwitz controversy that we published in our last issue, the British public has in our view seen only inadequate and one-sided reports on this matter. They have a right to a more balanced account, which is why we print here a series of articles by Yves Daoudal, principal editor of La Pensée Catholique. *They first appeared in* Présent *between August 19th and 23rd 1989. GL.)*

I. EVIDENCE GLEANED ON THE SPOT

If we are going to examine calmly the affair of the Carmelite convent at Oswiecim, near the Nazi camp at Auschwitz, the first requirement is to know exactly what we are talking about. Now the most obvious fact that emerges at this level is the blatant misrepresentation of the case on the part of certain Jewish organisations (1) and their representatives on the spot, brushing aside with cool impudence any attempt to expose the reality behind the travesty they are purveying. The persistent repetition and the wide publicity given to these lies are an indication that these Jewish bodies are not prepared to allow the Carmel affair to be examined objectively. Hence the insults to the Polish people, the Church and the Pope that abound in their articles and various utterances, the record for sheer baseness to date being held by Jacques Lanzmann's words in *VSD* (2) recently that if the Carmelite nuns of Auschwitz really wish to honour the dead of the *Shoah* (3), *"let them immolate themselves by fire and gas"*.

(1) The use of phrases such as "Jewish organisations" or "bodies" elsewhere in these articles is to be taken as referring solely to those which are pursuing or supporting the anti-Carmelite campaign: World Jewish Congress, B'nai Brith, CRIF, Universal Israelite Alliance, American Jewish Committee &c.

(2) The majority of quotations in these articles are from French-language Jewish publications. (Trans.)

(3) 'Shoah' ('catastrophe' in Hebrew) has now practically replaced the term 'holocaust' to describe the Nazi extermination of Jews during WW2.

At the beginning it was less a question of actual lying than of imprecise reporting and tendentious interpretation of the facts. At the end of January 1986 the plenary assembly of the World Jewish Congress called on the Carmelite sisters *"to renounce their project of building a convent on the soil of Auschwitz"*. The affair had been launched in October 1985 (by Belgian Catholics who had alerted the Jewish organisations). It may seem surprising that a body as important as the World Jewish Congress should have issued such a declaration without first checking the actual situation on the spot. For at that time the Carmelites had already been settled in the building known as 'the former theatre' for 15 months. Cardinal Decourtray of Lyons too, taking his cue from what the instigators of the affair had said, expressed his opposition to the "project". When finally forced to face the fact that the so-called "project" had been an established reality for some time, the next step was to assert that the reason why the existence of the convent was intolerable was that it had been established *"inside"* the camp at Auschwitz.

CARMELITE "OCCUPATION"

It was then that the lying began. At all costs the fiction had to be maintained that the convent was *inside* the camp, whereas no visitor to the camp would ever be able to find it, since it just is not there; the convent and the camp do not even communicate with each other. Their backs to the wall, the representatives of the Jewish organisations were reduced to admitting that the convent was not exactly *inside* the camp, but immediately added that since it is housed in a building considered by UNESCO as one of those constituting the site of Auschwitz, it is just as though it were inside the camp. And so the original untruth, kicked out by the front door, comes in again at the back, thus enabling the presenter of *France-Culture*'s programme of last June on the convent to make the unblushing claim: *"The Auschwitz camp is partly occupied* (4) *by the Carmelites."*

AN "IMMENSE" CROSS

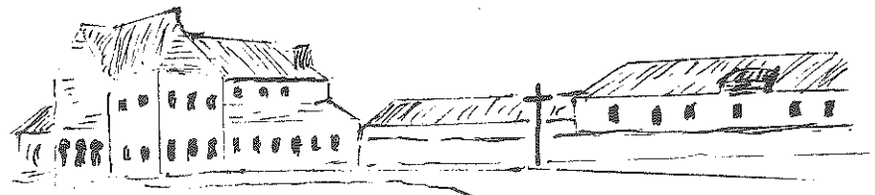
Then there was the setting up of a cross in the courtyard of the convent, a *"monumental"* cross *"looming over the camp"*, we read in *Jour J*. In *L'Actualité juive* Yael Suissa tells of her visit to Auschwitz: *"At the entrance to the Auschwitz*

camps, the erection of an immense cross is a sign of the presence of the Carmelites". This is supposed to be an eye-witness speaking, but what she tells us has nothing to do with reality; she must have been having hallucinations. At the camp entrance the cross is completely invisible. To see it you must go to the other end of the camp, as far as block 11. Once outside this building, the one where St. Maximilian Kolbe died, you can indeed just see the cross over the perimeter wall (5). And this is the only spot in the camp from which it can be seen. If you move to a position outside the next two blocks it is no longer visible. Not that this stopped Henri Tincq, after accompanying a Jewish demonstration at the camp, from writing in *Le Monde* of 18th July 1989 that *"The cross is the only thing one sees, from all the buildings inside the camp"*. And after his own visit to Auschwitz, Rabbi Sirat wrote in *Le Monde* of a cross so enormous that it *"casts its shadow over the whole camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau"*. (One wonders how big a cross would have to be to be visible at Birkenau, 2 to 3 miles from its actual site at Oswiecim [Auschwitz]!)

It is worth remembering that this cross, which was that of the present Pope's mass at Birkenau in 1979, was thereafter moved to the centre of what had been a gravel-pit in which hundreds of members of the Polish Catholic resistance were massacred in 1940-41. It was there too that hundreds of political officers of the Red Army were massacred. As a comparison, it will be noted that the communist authorities in Warsaw and Moscow have not raised the slightest protest against the presence of the sisters.

The special (indeed very special) envoy of Agence France-Presse, Nadège Puljak-Ehrmann, who also took part in the demonstration I have mentioned, took the matter a stage further when she reported: *"The presence of the Carmelites at Auschwitz, the existence of several large crosses in the camp and, above all, the absence of any mention of the word 'Jew' on the commemorative tablets displayed inside*

(4) Clearly Daoudal sees the choice of this word as not accidental, no doubt because of its special meaning for French listeners. (Trans.)
(5) Daoudal's original article was accompanied by several photographs. As far as we can tell, by comparison with the human figures also photographed, the cross would appear to be about 13 to 14 feet high. (Trans.)



Simplified sketch of S.W. Oswiecim. On the left, the Carmelite convent. The two other buildings lie inside the camp; that on the right is the 'death block', where St. Maximilien Kolbe died. In the centre, in the convent grounds, is the famous cross.

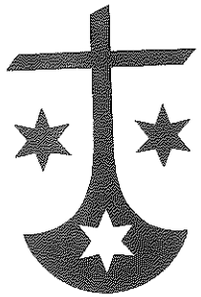
the camp in which several million Jews were exterminated are all signs of a campaign to deny that the victims of the Shoah were overwhelmingly Jewish (6), *and this in the eyes of the world-wide Jewish community."*

This is a typical example of the sort of thing one can read every week in the Jewish press, A new element, however, is the mention of *"several large crosses in the camp"*. Sabine Roitman had indeed written (in *Tribune juive*): *"crosses are numerous"*, but she had added *"outside the camp"*, and had made no reference to their size. In fact the only cross of any size is the one in the convent grounds. The only other ones are very small ones on the wall and in the convent garden, and the one over its front gate. This last provokes Sabine Roitman to the indignant comment *"a cross above the gateway, flanked by two tiny Magen Dawids"* (7). Théo Klein agrees, describing it as *"a cross surrounded by three Magen Dawids"*, and sees it as yet another 'provocation', whereas a mere glance is enough to show that all we have is the official emblem of the order of Carmelites, and the alleged 'shields of David' are the quite distinct six-pointed stars of heraldry.

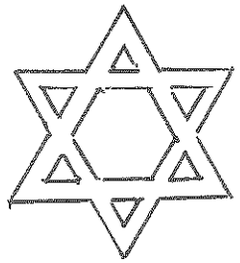
"DIMINISHING THE SUFFERING OF THE JEWS"

The absence of any reference to the words 'Jew' or 'Jewish' is a constant theme of the campaign against the Carmelites. The accusation the *"the Shoah is being de-judaized"*

(6) I translate "déjudaïsation de la Shoah". The 'several million Jews' were, of course, not exterminated at Auschwitz-I, but several kilometers away at Birkenau. (Trans.)
(7) The hexagram or 'Shield of David', commonly used as a Jewish symbol and present on the national flag of Israel. (Trans.)



Carmelite emblem



'Magen Dawid' or Shield of David

was originally targeted against the communist government of Poland (seen as being anti-semitic), and now the Church is being accused of putting the final touches to this 'de-judaization' by its installation of the convent, a "crime" against the memory of the countless Jewish victims, so that a simple playing-down of the extent of Jewish suffering has now become a blasphemous 'christianizing' of the Shoah.

It is not our purpose here to defend the Polish communist régime which has of course used its museum in the Auschwitz camp in the interests of Communist and pro-Soviet propaganda. Our concern is with the concrete realities. And truth itself obliges us to report that the museum buildings house photos of the *Shoah* and an exhibition of Jewish prayer-shawls, and that one block (No. 27) is entirely devoted to the *"history of the Jewish martyrs"*. At the entrance to the museum several of the posters displayed refer directly to the *Shoah*, and on the impressive monument to the dead erected at Birkenau (the immense extermination camp Auschwitz-II set up in the commune of Brzezinka), the two central tablets are in Hebrew characters. In the book sold at the museum entrance, the preface tells us: *"From the spring of 1942, Auschwitz became a centre for the large-scale extermination of the Jewish population, deported there from practically the whole of Europe. Enormous trainloads of victims were shunted directly up to the gas-chambers."* And this is set out in considerable detail in the 3rd chapter.

II. THE SITES, THE HISTORY AND THE SYMBOLS

It is thus not true that the memory of the martyrdom of the Jews is absent from the Auschwitz camp museum. What is

true, however, is that the museum's official designation, "Monument to the martyrdom of the Polish nation, and of other nations", relegates the Shoah to the background. But it cannot be denied that the Jewish institutions have for 40 years been content to put up with this relative underplaying of the Jewish tragedy. They have never demanded that the administration of the museum should be taken out of the hands of the communists and entrusted to a Jewish organization, though this would be only logical, seeing that, in the words of Ady Steg, president of the Universal Israelite Alliance and a 'negotiator' in the Carmelite convent affir, *"the symbol of Auschwitz not merely concerns the Jews, but concerns the Jews alone."*

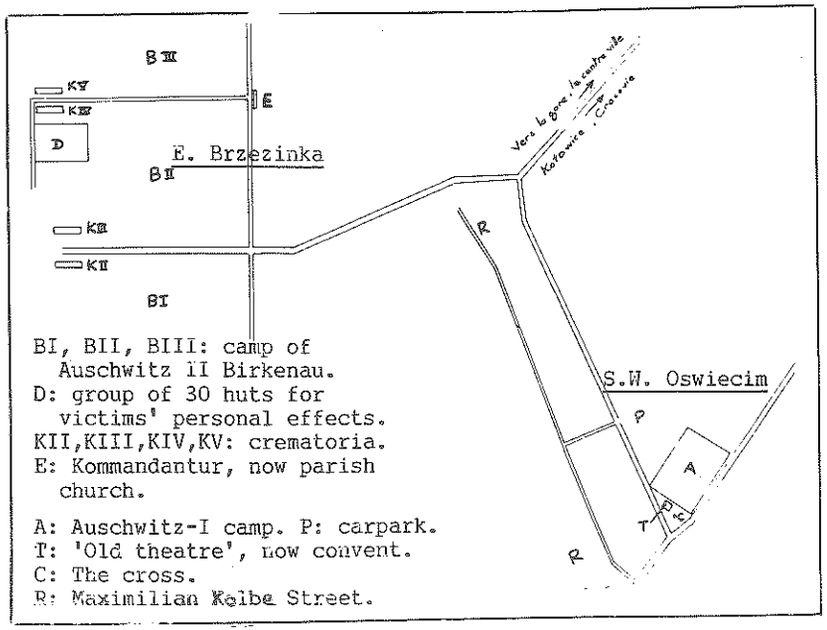
Those organizations see the symbol as centred on the museum at Auschwitz-I, hence their demand for the Carmelites to move from the neighbourhood of that camp (despite the fact that the 'old theatre' was never among the buildings that house the museum) - and not from Auschwitz-II, the Birkenau camp where so much of the Shoah massacres took place.

AUSCHWITZ-I

Yet the layout of the sites and their history provides a pretty clear indication of where the real symbols are. Most of the buildings of Auschwitz-I are brick constructions built long before the Nazi period, for they formed an Austrian army barracks in the days (up to the end of WW1) when this part of Poland was part of Austria-Hungary. When Poland regained its independence, the barracks were naturally used by the Polish army. In 1940 the Nazis chose it as (ostensibly) a camp for prisoners of war and political prisoners. Thousands of Soviet nationals died there, as well as tens of thousands of Poles. The camp was in fact an important element in the genocide of the Poles announced by Hitler from the very beginning of the war (*"Kill without pity men, women and children of Polish origin and speaking Polish"*) and loyally confirmed Himmler (*"all Poles must disappear from the face of the earth"*). And that is what Auschwitz symbolizes for the Poles.

AUSCHWITZ-II-BIRKENAU

Later, and largely to provide for the extermination of the Jews, the camp was complemented by the setting up of



BI, BII, BIII: camp of Auschwitz II Birkenau.
D: group of 30 huts for victims' personal effects.
KII,KIII,KIV,KV: crematoria.
E: Kommandantur, now parish church.
A: Auschwitz-I camp. P: carpark.
T: 'Old theatre', now convent.
C: The cross.
R: Maximilian Kolbe Street.

Auschwitz II Birkenau (4 kilometres to the north-west of Auschwitz-I). This new camp, a totally Nazi construction, most of whose blocks were wooden hutments, gives from one's very first glance a very different impression from that of a small provincial barracks. As far as the eye can reach, all we see is a hideous prospect of brick chimneys, all that is left of the hutments in their perimeters of barbed wire, and the apocalyptic vision of heaps of rubble, the ruins of gigantic crematorium furnaces. It is there that the "symbol", the real unbearable symbol of the Shoah is to be found, although even this camp cannot be claimed exclusively by the Jews - far from it.

As for the 'theatre' (now the convent), it was built shortly before the 1914-18 war, to provide entertainment for the Austrian troops. War broke out before it was completed, and no show was ever put on there. Half abandoned, it was used to store unwanted lumber. The Jewish organisations firmly maintain that the Nazis used the theatre to store the personal effects and clothing taken from Jewish victims and supplies of the gas Zyklon B, and most commentators take this as proven. In fact, nothing is known about this. What one can say is that the Nazi machine was hyper-

efficient, even when its purpose was criminal. It seems rather unlikely for them to stock their Zyklon B near Auschwitz-I camp when to all intents and purposes they were only using it 4 kilometers away at Auschwitz II Birkenau, a far larger camp where they had all the space they needed. What is known is that there were thirty huts at Birkenau used for the storage of victims' personal effects. The small theatre (and future convent) would have been nothing by comparison. Yet it is the theatre that is now described as "a symbol of the symbol" by Théo Klein.

THE VICTIMS, JEWISH... AND GENTILES

Nadège Puljak-Ehrmann speaks of the extermination of *"several million Jews"* (at Auschwitz I of all places!). In *Actualité juive*, Gérard Ghariani evokes the memory of the camp *"in which nigh on 4 million of our brothers and sisters lost their lives..."* Polish government statistics estimate the total number of deaths in the Auschwitz complex at 4 million, an approximate figure that has no doubt been generously rounded up. Historians today tend to put the number of Jewish victims at around 1.35 million. Léon Poliakov, "at the risk of exaggerating", puts it at 2 million. Whatever the real figure is - we shall probably never know it - it will never lose its unspeakable horror for us. But the various figures advanced by communist, Jewish or independent historians make it clear that Auschwitz can never be the exclusive symbol of the Jews alone. And it is odious, to say the least, to deny others their share in the horror. *"The only mothers and children deported to the extermination camps were Jewish"*, claims Sabine Roitman as well as others. This is completely false. Gipsy mothers and children, non-Jewish Polish mothers and children are entitled to call on us to respect their deaths. We may well ask who the 'revisionists' (8) are now. Moreover the group that, proportionally, has known the greatest number of deaths after the Jews was the Polish clergy. Is this the so-called "responsibility of the Church" for the Shoah?

(8) 'Revisionism' (i.e. re-writing history) has in recent years come to be used of the work of historians who, since WW2, have begun to question the validity of the fashionable liberal-progressive (generally pro-Jewish or pro-Soviet) interpretation of recent history. (Trans.)

Cardinal Macharski, archbishop of Cracow, reminded us in January 1986 that *"for the Polish people, Auschwitz is a synonym for suffering and extermination which affected most of our families."* I saw evidence for this on my last visit. I looked for private lodgings in Cracow, and found them in the house of a lady who, when I told her I was going to Auschwitz, gave me some candles and asked me to light them before the wall that commemorates those who were shot, in memory of her father, a liaison agent for General Sikorski (9).

Just as they have never mounted a world-wide campaign against the communist government's exploitation of Auschwitz as a symbol, a myth justifying its regime and its propaganda, in the same way the Jewish organisations have never noisily protested against the *"polonization"* of the camp. Apparently they did not feel either Communism or Polish national feeling to be a threat to them. It was not until they felt they could claim that the site was being *"christianized"* that they began to give voice.

AUSCHWITZ AND CHRISTIANITY

The trouble is that the Poles are Catholics. The faith makes itself felt everywhere in Poland. It is only logical therefore that it should be felt here too, in this place that saw the climax of man's revolt against God and against man, the image of God. *"The Carmelite convent at Auschwitz is one of the ways in which the Church in Poland wants to reply to the challenge of the Nazi extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau"*, said Cardinal Macharski, pointing to the setting up of the convent as a natural extension of the Pope's homily in the Birkenau camp in 1979, a homily pronounced before a crowd of a million Poles, beneath the cross that now stands in the convent grounds, and which began with this quotation from St. John: *"This is the victory that has vanquished the world: it is our faith."* (It was in this homily that the Pope called Auschwitz "the Golgotha of the modern world".)

---

(9) Leader of the refugee Polish government-in-exile in London during World War 2, he died in a plane crash in 1943. (Trans.)

For the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the camp, Cardinal Macharski wrote: *"It is impossible to conceive Auschwitz in terms of the faith unless we see how it participates in the terrible mystery of Easter."* Last year Pope John Paul II, with specific reference to the Shoah, reminded the Jewish community of Vienna that, *"for us, each human suffering finds its ultimate meaning in the cross of Jesus Christ"*. This is the justification for a discreet presence of the cross and of Catholic worship at places where the suffering has been so great.

It must be said that neither the convent at Dachau, the chapels at Maidanek and Sobibor nor the parish church at Birkenau (housed in the former kommandantur of the Auschwitz II extermination camp!) had aroused any such world-wide campaign of protest. This treatment was reserved for a convent outside the perimeter of Auschwitz-I, and having less to do with the Shoah than the four others. And everything has happened as though the opening of the convent has been used as a pretext by the Jewish organizations for a violent hardening of their hostility to the Church. We now hear threats such as "breaching the dialogue", "boycotting the pope", and a revival of the worst slanders about the Church's attitude to the Jews during the war. It was not some little-known Jewish controversialist, but the World Jewish Congress itself that declared: *"The controversy about the Carmelite convent is symptomatic of the Vatican's evident desire to rewrite the history of the Holocaust and that of the Church's role during this terrible period."* Let us not forget that it was the same World Jewish Congress that in 1945 made a gift of 2 million lire to the Holy See for its activities in favour of the Jews during the war...

III. THE "GENEVA AGREEMENT"...WAS NOT AN AGREEMENT

And so, as we know, "negotiations" took place in Geneva between a Jewish delegation demanding that the convent should be moved and a Catholic delegation led by Cardinal Decourtray and making the same demand... Predictably, it was "agreed" (on February 22nd 1987) that the Carmelites would leave the immediate neighbourhood of the camp. And Cardinal Macharski of Cracow, unwillingly dragged in by the 'negotiators', had to give in to the diktat. The convent

would be transferred to a "Centre for information, education, contact and prayer", in which the Church would commit itself in particular to *"fight against dis-information, the playing-down of the Shoah and revisionism"* (see note 8). The Centre and its convent would be built 500 metres away from the present site. In other words, the Carmelites would still be on the Auschwitz site in the widest sense: the perimeter of the Nazi camps, with their annexes, industrial installations and farms covers 42 square kilometers. This did not deter Cardinal Decourtray from insisting on the transfer of the convent to a spot where there would be *"no ambiguity in its location"*, while Théo Klein, leader of the Jewish delegation, pressed for the convent to be sited *"outside the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp area"* which is of course more than 3 kilometers from its present location.

Poor old Théo Klein has now become a target for attacks from those Jewish quarters who are most hostile to the Church. They reproach him for accepting the creation of the Centre which, financed solely by the Catholic side, would merely represent a further step in the *"christianization of the Shoah"*, and he is even attacked for having agreed to negotiations when there was *"nothing to negotiate"* with those guilty of such a *"crime"*. With these words Claude Bochurberg, writing in *Actualité juive* of July 27th 1989, is accusing Catholics (just Polish Catholics, or is he incriminating the whole Church?) of responsibility for the 'final solution'. And Klein is being held responsible for the church at Birkenau, the chapel at Sobibor, etc.

A FIRST STAGE

Those who imagine that once the CENTRE is built the affair will blow over are greatly mistaken. The affair of the Carmelite convent is only one stage in a process. It has enabled the Jewish organisations to assess how effectively they could extract concessions from Catholics.

But further demands are already surfacing, relayed by Jean Kahn, the new chairman of CRIF (Committee of Representative Jewish Institutions in France). *"Calling for the withdrawal of the Carmelites is not enough"* writes Gérard Rabinovitch in *Actualité juive*, *"we must insist on the dismantling of all signs of the presence of the Church at all sites connected with the Shoah."* In the same paper, Claude Bochurberg adds: *"Just as Nazism failed in its project, in just the same way it can be affirmed that the christianisation of the Shoah will not succeed. We are no longer prepared to put up with humiliation. Judaism is more alive than it ever was. Nothing will be strong enough to weaken the determination of our people... to put an end to the insulting of the victims."*

The obvious next target is probably that of the parish church at Brzezinka. Installed in the former Birkenau Kommandantur building, it is dedicated to the Holy Cross, (that cross in which, as John Paul has reminded us, all human suffering finds its meaning), and one of its altars is dedicated to Blessed Edith Stein, the Carmelite of Jewish origin who died in the camp. The cross on its roof, though not large, is visible from practically everywhere in the immense camp, even from the crematoria at its farther end. Prior to the Carmelite convent affair, no one seems to have noticed this. The "agreement" of February 1987 specifically states that: *"There will be no permanent Catholic place of worship on the territories of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camps"*...

But the campaign to outlaw any "christianisation of the Shoah" is not likely to stop there. Sabine Roitman, in *Tribune juive*, directs her disapproving gaze on the church at Nowa Huta, the church built in the teeth of government bully-boy tactics by the heroic workers of that new industrial suburb of the royal city of Cracow, a suburb that was intended as a symbol of communist power, based on steel and atheism, but which is now a symbol of Polish Christianity. The staircase leading to the church crypt is lined with a series of *pietà*, carvings commemorating the saddest events in Polish history. Among them is a *'Pietà of Oswiecim'*... We know too that the beatification of the Jewish convert Carmelite Edith Stein is considered as another "provocation". The cult of St. Maximilian Kolbe (10) (whose name has been

(10) In the very year of Fr. Kolbe's canonisation, there were accusations of a certain anti-semitism in his pre-war apostolate and publications even in some western Catholic periodicals. (Trans.)

given to one of the longest streets in Oswiecim) is also of course regarded as an element of the "christianisation of the Shoah". If the Jewish organizations undertake an in-depth investigation into the churches of Poland - and of contemporary Polish culture - they will find no shortage of pretexts for fresh demands. One can see no end to it.

MGR. MACHARSKI'S "VOLTE-FACE"?

It was clearly his awareness of this campaign and the increasingly violent hostility of the attacks on the convent that brought Cardinal Macharski of Cracow to the point of issuing his declaration of 10th August 1989, in which he stated: *"Such acts and such behaviour are incompatible with the project of setting up a Jewish-Christian Centre. In this atmosphere of aggressive demands it is impossible to proceed to the construction of an institution built on mutual respect. Peace can only be built if the desire for peace is there."* This declaration was immediately broadcast by Radio Vatican in all its news-bulletins.

And so Cardinal Macharski called a sudden halt to the application of the Geneva "agreement", according to the terms of which the Carmelite was to be transferred (before 22nd February 1989) to a 'Centre for Information, Education and Prayer'. One may well wonder what was the last straw that broke the camel's back. A priori, it was surely the incidents of July 18th, when Jewish demonstrators climbed over the convent gates and occupied the garden before being expelled by workmen (and complaining of their rough handling ....to the archbishop's office!)

But almost 4 weeks elapsed between that demonstration and the Cardinal's decision. On the other hand, July 27th saw the publication in *VSD* of the article in which Jacques Lanzmann had the gall to state: *"If the Auschwitz Carmelites really want to honour the victims of the Shoah, let them sacrifice their own lives by fire and gas."* On August 3rd we gave suitable publicity to that shameful statement, our comment on that occasion being: *"Taking full advantage of the weakness of Catholic reactions, the demands made by Judaism continue to escalate, with no apparent limit to the process."*

The name 'Lanzmann' has a certain notoriety in Poland. We have just read Jacques Lanzmann's infamous statement. The Poles know another Lanzmann, Claude, the author of the anti-Polish film pamphlet *'Shoah'*, which the Polish government lost no time in showing on television as a typical example of western dis-information about Poland. Poles, Polish Catholics thus have seen the film, and since then they know Lanzmann as the man who has insulted them and has spread the most infamous slanders about them. Nor is he alone: Cardinal Decourtray showed a similar outlook when, on Good Friday (of all days!) on French television, he sanctimoniously echoed the slanders when he spoke of Poles *"beating Jews with crosses"*, a saying that has gone the rounds in Poland, particularly among the clergy, whom it has deeply offended.

This then is the background to Cardinal Macharski's decision. Immediately CRIF denounced his "breach of his given word", the American Jewish Committee spoke of "a serious betrayal of written commitments"; B'nai Brith, more soberly, declared that the Archbishop of Cracow "had gone back on his own word". As for *Le Monde*, it baldly stated that Cardinal Macharski had announced that *"the Catholic Church* (sic) *would not respect its engagements"*, although Cardinal Decourtray for his part emphasized *"that an agreement is binding on its signatories"* and that consequently the Centre would be built.

This is just not so. Cardinal Macharski is not guilty of "breach of his given word" or "betrayal of written commitments". A signature does not necessarily bind its signatory. To take an extreme example, if I sign an "agreement" to raid a bank, I cannot be blamed if I do not carry this out; on the contrary, morals and the law oblige me not to do so. No unjust agreement can have legal force. Now the "Geneva convention" is unjust and indefensible both in form and in substance. It is legally invalid and morally bad from whichever side one looks at it.

A DIKTAT

To begin with, we cannot properly speak of a 'convention' in which two parties have freely come to an agreement. It is more of a *diktat*, a fact that has been emphasized by Father Dominic Wider, provincial of the Polish Carmelites, and

Maciej Giertych, a member of the social council of the primate of Poland (11). And a diktat that has been imposed by a Jewish-Catholic coalition on the Archbishop of Cracow and on religious who were not represented during the negotiations.

The "Catholic delegation" has committed itself to shifting a convent over which it has no jurisdiction. The "Jewish delegation" has taken cognizance of this commitment, one that it has imposed on the Catholic side by international media pressure and thanks to the eager compliance of Mgr. Decourtray, whom a Polish priest, a survivor from Birkenau, Mgr. Kiedrowski, has named as the "Trojan horse" of the Jewish organizations in the affair.

The members of the "Catholic delegation" were not delegated by anyone. They were self-appointed. What is more, they had no authority to decide on the future of a Carmelite convent situated in a Polish diocese. This is obvious in the case of the three leaders of the "delegation", the archbishops of Lyons, Paris and Brussels, who are interfering in a diocese that is not their own and in which they have no authority. Even Cardinal Macharski himself, the diocesan bishop, cannot intervene or make decisions for a Carmelite convent which is exempt from his jurisdiction since the decree of the Roman Congregation for Religious confirming the convent's foundation. Only the building of the Jewish-Christian 'Centre' (decided by others) falls under his authority. But the Centre is linked to the moving of the convent, and none of the "delegates" has any authority over the latter.

The Auschwitz convent is the concern solely of the Order of Carmelites, the Congregation for Religious and ultimately, if need be, the Pope. The Catholic "delegation" at Geneva had no representative of the Carmelites, of the Congregation or the Pope. (As for the "Jewish delegation", it included no representative of the Jews of Poland.)

THE CHURCH HAS MADE NO PROMISES

We thus have a simple reply to those who accuse "the

(11) See the statement of Professor Giertych on p.47 of APROPOS No.6 for July 1989.

Church". All we need to say is:"'the Church' has made no commitment, despite the assertions of Cardinal Decourtray, and the "agreement" which some would have us think commits her was ratified by "delegates" without any authority or power in the affair. This "agreement" is null and void; it commits no one, since none of its signatories has any authority over the Carmelites."

But there is a more serious aspect: the "agreement" rests on a historical error and a blasphemy.

The historical error is that of considering Auschwitz-I as the "site of the Shoah" when it was primarily conceived as an element in the extermination of the Poles. The convent, situated in any case outside the camp, is not built on a "Jewish cemetery" but near the building in which St. Maximilian Kolbe died. The cross stands on the site of a gravel-pit where hundreds of Polish Catholics were massacred.

THE BLASPHEMY

But, important as these considerations are for Poles, and for respect for the truth, it is really the blasphemy underlying the Geneva "convention" that radically invalidates it. That blasphemy is the one spotlighted by Jean Madiran in the PRÉSENT of August 17th 1989. The reason brought forward for moving the Carmelites by the leaders of the Jewish delegation was in the last analysis a theological one. Right at the outset of the affair, Ady Steg maintained that Auschwitz *"is the one place in the whole universe from which no sort of prayer should conceivably be raised"*. And Théo Klein said: *"The Jews died in the midst of indifference, they have a right to the silence from which they suffered so profoundly. The sky was empty at the time; it should remain so."* We can find the origin of this thesis in the views of the Israeli philosopher Martin Buber on the *'eclipse of God'* at Auschwitz. This is what the signatories to the "agreement" called *"the legitimately expressed sentiments of the Jewish delegation"*, and they involve forbidding Catholic worship and prayer (on the part of 4 cardinals) in a particular place in a Catholic country...

MGR. KIEDROWSKI'S TESTIMONY

"To maintain that Heaven was empty, that God was silent in the camps of the Shoah, is a lie and a blasphemy. God has never been absent or silent. He was there, deep in the abyss of the concentration camp." The author of these words is Mgr. Witold Kiedrowski, a survivor from Maidanek and Birkenau, and his witness is charged with poignant emotion:

"God was present in the concentration camps, just as He is in the gulags, in the thousands upon thousands of acts of charity and human solidarity, without distinction of race, religion or nationality. He was present in our prayer, most often silent, but communal too, as when a rabbi and I prayed together at Maidanek, or when I prayed with the dying, never asking what their race or religion was... I saw thousands of prisoners die. I did not see or hear a single one, Jew or Christian, blaspheming. In contrast, I saw and heard them praying, even at the risk of incurring additional suffering....

God was present deep within each of us. In rags, tortured or dying, we yet knew ourselves to be human beings and therefore in the closest constant and existential relationship with HIM.

If God was absent, it was from the sphere surrounding us where our executioners lived. They had driven God out of their consciences. And so they had become inhuman, like savage, bloodstained animals.

By contrast, the concentration camps themselves with their prisoners were like cities of God besieged by the 'godless'. And so, to drive the Carmelite nuns away from this place of all places is to capitulate, to surrender the city to the 'godless', to abdicate in the face of the enemy.

Those who claim that the sky was empty at Auschwitz, that God was not here, that it is inconceivable therefore that prayer should be offered up at Auschwitz, should make a little effort of imagination.

Let them imagine that they are on the parade-ground of one of the countless concentration camps at the time of the roll-call. Let them dare to announce to the prisoners that from now on, by order of the Geneva Convention, prayer is forbidden there. It does not need a great effort of imagination to predict the reaction of the prisoners. For this is precisely the prohibition they were daily faced with from the moment they arrived in the camp, and it came from the Nazis and their henchmen...

The silent prayer of the Carmelite nuns is the most authentic extension of that silent prayer, of that spark of humanity that every prisoner, even in his hopeless situation, kept alive in his heart."

Mgr. Kiedrowski draws the relevant corollary that if the sky over Auschwitz is to remain empty, if God is to be excluded from it, if Auschwitz is to *'atheized'* (which is

what it amounts to), this is the equivalent of appealing to Satan (for no place can be spiritually "empty") and paying homage to those who at Auschwitz were seeking to destroy the image of God in man. (We might add that this theory of the empty sky, the sky that must remain empty, can lead to the suppression of Christianity not only at Auschwitz but over all the earth's surface. For God "was silent" at Golgotha too...)

The immeasurable blasphemy of the "empty sky" over Auschwitz, the "theological" justification of the "Geneva agreement", makes that agreement intrinsically evil, unacceptable for a Catholic, whatever practical dispositions may be accepted by a delegation claiming to commit the Church. That is why Cardinal Macharski, who signed it under pressure from a number of outside forces and who since then has not ceased to reflect on the question, cannot in any way be accused of breaking his word. An unjust convention is null and void. Blasphemy is the worst of all injustices.

Yves Daoudal

Postscript We would not wish to dissociate ourselves from anything in Monsieur Daoudal's article. We would just wish to add or emphasize certain points.

The case in favour of the Carmelites has been quite inadequately presented to the British public. If we reduce the argument of the 'Jewish organisations' to its simplest terms, it runs:

"Since Jews were the main (even the only) sufferers under Nazism, Christian prayers are an offensive intrusion into a purely Jewish sorrow. (And, deliberately ignoring the distinction between the two camps, Auschwitz II Birkenau, where the majority of the Jews died, and Auschwitz I, where on the whole they did not), therefore the Carmelites must not be allowed to pray next door to Auschwitz I (where the victims were overwhelmingly not Jewish!).

This so obviously illogical that we have a right to be suspicious as to the real aim behind it.

Events in the two months since the article was published suggest that the anti-Carmelite campaign is a broadly based one, drawing support from prominent Jews (the chief rabbi of Warsaw, the Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel) and the government of Israel (which sent its minister for religious

affairs to put pressure on the Polish authorities), but also from French "anti-racist" groups (MRAP and SOS-Racisme), liberal and leftist organs like *Le Monde* and the *Daily Mirror*, and even from the international banks, rumoured to be unwilling to re-schedule Poland's crushing foreign debts if the Carmel is not moved.

Note too how the stakes have been raised. What began as the relatively small-scale question of one Polish convent has step by step escalated; the charge of anti-semitism has progressively been raised against the Poles and their cardinals, and against Catholicism as a whole, until the Holy See itself is caricatured as guilty of racial and religious bias.

And this despite the evident fact that Rome has been yielding ground to Judaism ever since the Council (the disappearance of "perfidious Jews" from the Good Friday prayers, the 1985 directive of Cardinal Willebrand's pontifical commission calling on us to work with the Jews "to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah", and John Paul II's own placatory words to the Roman synagogue in April 1986 [12] are but three examples of this.)

The Church's reluctance to submit to this current demand, its unwillingness to surrender its universal vocation to save all mankind, Jew and Gentile, no doubt infuriates a certain Jewish lobby (and their hidden masters). That vocation is being defended today (under God) by a handful of devoted Polish contemplative nuns, their supporters and bishops, just as Christian Europe was saved from the Turks under the walls of Vienna in 1683 by the tiny Polish army of John Sobieski. We must not allow their cause, and ours, to go by default.

G.L.

---

(12) Readers will find the subject more fully treated in Jean Madiran's "The Jewish Question in the Church", a supplement to APPROACHES No.93.)